

Annual Report 2026 on the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices

General information

Name in full + acronym	Independent Retail Europe
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N° in the transparency register	034546859-02
Date of signature of the Code	5 July 2021
Step of the food chain represented (ex.: primary production, production, processing, trade, retail...)	Groups and associations of independent retailers in both the food and non-food sectors
Who do you represent? (e.g. number of members, companies, SMEs)	Independent Retail Europe represents 25 groups and their over 479.000 independent retailers, who manage more than 708.000 sales outlets, with a combined retail turnover of more than 1.446 billion euros and generating a combined wholesale turnover of 657 billion euros. This represents a total employment of more than 6.306.000 persons.

Independent Retail Europe's pledges

Endorse the aspirational objectives set out in this Code (where applicable)

Independent Retail Europe fully endorses the Code by supporting its aspirational objectives and informing and engaging our membership on the Code.

Promote and disseminate this Code with(in) our constituency/ies

Through our monthly newsletter, we regularly inform our members about the Code of Conduct and workshops organised under the Code. Being a member of the Liaison Group of the Code offers an opportunity to be in frequent contact with the European Commission, to demonstrate that members engage actively in sustainability measures, and to advocate for support measures (enablers) for members to help them meet their sustainability objectives. In the context of the Liaison Group, we have organised several events in recent years on different aspects of the Code of Conduct to promote the Code and established an EU Sustainability Award.

Encourage our members to align their sustainability actions and/or business practices to the aspirational objectives and targets of the Code and invite them, on a voluntary basis, to adhere to this Code, as appropriate

Through our monthly newsletter and internal meetings, we encourage our members to integrate the aspirational goals of the Code of Conduct in their business models thus driving the green transition. The promotion of sustainability and circularity, consumer health and safety, and protection of the environment and biodiversity is furthermore a key part of our manifesto for the current legislative period.

Our members support the objectives of the Code by, inter alia,

- stepping up the fight against food waste (Objective 2);
- collecting and recycling and using recycled packaging (Objective 4);
- adapting portion sizes (Objective 2);
- reformulating their private label products to reduce salt, sugar and fat (Objective 1);
- responding to consumer demand for higher standards in animal welfare (Objective 6);
- sourcing responsibly and move towards organic and local products including the provision of training to market those products and on sustainable practices (Objective 7); and
- investing in greener operations through the installations of solar panels, e-chargers in parking lots and electronic truck fleets (Objective 3).

Many of our members undertake great efforts to adopt solutions that contribute to a circular economy two original examples:

- One food retail member group has adopted its own guidelines for a circular business approach. One aim is to plan and construct buildings from the outset in such a way that all building materials can be reused at the end of their life cycle.
- Another group is testing innovative stores that are being built using fully prefabricated wooden modules, which, thanks to detachable connections, reduces construction time and allows for later reuse.

Unfortunately, during the last two years, we did not manage to convince SME retailers to sign up to the Code. This is mainly due to the fact that they do not see an added value in the Code as they consider their sustainability efforts self-evident and it does not provide for any enablers or support but only imposes more reporting requirements. The recently adopted simplified reporting requirements for SMEs may help to gain new SME signatories. Additionally, we have used the year 2025-2026 to develop and promote our very own EU Sustainability Award that offers targeted support to SMEs.

Establishment of the EU Sustainability Award “The Foodies” aimed to boost motivation for the sustainability transition among SMEs

Together with the European Commission, we have developed a Code of Conduct Awards, to acknowledge efforts along the whole food supply chain, with the aim to recognise and celebrate the best practices of participating actors (similar to the [EU Organic Awards](#), organised since 2022). The award will specifically focus on SMEs, which are often less likely to sign up to the Code. The

initiative aims to boost motivation for the sustainability transition among SMEs, by enhancing their visibility, and celebrating new ideas, technologies and processes. Their products will be showcased on the Transition Pathway Platform, and they will be allowed to use a special label to highlight that they are finalists and/or winners of the Awards.

The EU Sustainability Award has been named [The Foodies](#). It recognises the standout achievements among the 4,5 million small and medium sized enterprises powering Europe's agri-food ecosystem. In 2026, it will be organized in collaboration with the European Commission (DG GROW) and in partnership with [SIAL in Paris](#), the world's largest food and drink exhibition, that will take place in the week of 17-21 October 2026. The deadline for application to the Foodies awards was on 13 July. To qualify for the awards, EU companies must be recognised as SMEs according to EU recommendation 2003/361. Additionally, these SMEs are required to sign the Code of Conduct through the Agri-food Transition Pathway Platform. However, signing the Code could take place alongside the application process, allowing a pledge to the Code to also count as an award entry, making it easy for SMEs to apply.

Explore the possibility of developing sector-specific tools and resources in support of this Code

The organisation of our membership events allows members to showcase their experiences in the use of different tools to improve their carbon footprint and to contribute to more sustainable local communities.

On our homepage, we share best-practice examples in the area of sustainability of our members. Under our category [Retailers for Sustainability](#), a long list of project examples from different members can be found that enhance environmental, economic and social sustainability. Since July 2025, members published information on 12 sustainability project examples. The projects reach from support for beekeepers, over adaptations of packaging materials for own-label products to support for sustainable banana production and milk cow husbandry via strict certification standards. Recently French members announced to support their farmers whose production was badly affected by the drought this summer. Through our monthly newsletter, we inform members about toolkits of the European Commission to reduce consumer food waste, including initiatives such as the EU Ecolabel, financial support opportunities such as the Funding and Tenders Portal and the online platform on the Transition Pathway.

Continue to engage in dialogue with other food chain/systems actors and EU and international policy-makers to forge (new) relationships, exchange good practices and discuss challenges encountered, learn from each other (studies, projects) and create better mutual understanding, and identify opportunities for collaboration and potential partnership

Building alliances on issues of common interest is of paramount importance to show that a position is shared by a wide set of economic operators across the food chain. We have spearheaded or co-signed many letters addressed to EU policymakers that gathered support from many actors along the supply chain. We regularly engage with other parts of the chain in the context of the Liaison Group and the EU advisory/expert groups. We also invite other parts of the chain to contribute to our conferences. Throughout the mandate, we were active in addressing issues affecting food retailers' relationships with large suppliers and farmers and also engaged with other fellow stakeholders (Objective 6):

- We actively contributed to the development of the Transition Pathway for Retail, that is vital to ensure a smooth digital and green transition and a resilient retail sector. The Pathway dedicates a separate chapter to SME retail and is an important tool to promote the goals of the Code of Conduct. In the context of the pathway, an online platform was launched in June 2025 under the title “Transition Pathway Stakeholder Support Platform for the Agri-Food Industrial Ecosystem”. The online platform provides information on policies and legislation, existing EU funding for the agri-food sector, a workspace for digital interaction between the different interest groups and an EU award scheme for businesses promoting a healthy and sustainable diet (The Foodies – see above). The Code of Conduct is a key element of the platform, which allows the signatories of the Code to use special features and to upload their annual reports showcasing their activities on the objectives outlined in the Code.
- We have been granted membership in the Expert Group on Waste and participated in the meetings organised since June 2025. The aim of the expert group is to support the Commission in producing legislation and guidelines for an effective implementation of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (EU) 2025/40 (PPWR), also for food products. The meetings cover discussions on issues that have been raised by stakeholders and where work on the guidelines as well as delegated or implementing acts is in progress.
- We are a member of and actively participate in the European Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response Mechanism (EFSCM), an EU expert group bringing together stakeholders, EU Member States representatives and the Commission to support resilience in the food chain. Frequent reporting by members and exchange enables the EU to take measures to avoid food supply crises.
- We are a member of the Advisory Group on the Sustainability of Food Systems (AGSFS). The group is informed about all EU initiatives related to the Farm to Fork Strategy. Several consultations were held on the issue, to which we responded.
- Since its inauguration in 2016, we are member of the Platform on Food Waste. The platform brings together EU Member States, international organisations, representatives from the private sector and from consumer associations in order to exchange best practices and develop guidelines on how to avoid food waste in the different sectors. During the 19th plenary meeting of the EU Platform on Food Losses in June 2026, the European Commission presented the results of its survey on the Platform’s performance, to which Independent Retail Europe participated (see Monthly Bulletin of May 2026). The input collected will form the basis for the re-establishment of the Platform and the design of its future mandate. Independent Retail Europe will apply for membership again as the platform allows us to provide input to EU initiatives aimed at reducing food waste and to showcase members’ initiatives.
- On 17 June 2024, we joined the EU Agri-food Chain observatory (AFCO). Its aim is to restore trust in the supply chain and to increase transparency on production costs, margins and transmission of value added along the food supply chain. For this purpose, it will aim to build EU indices reflecting these aspects and will also discuss trading practices. AFCO already held 6 meetings to which Independent Retail Europe participated, and where Independent Retail Europe or its member made three presentations (e.g. about the structure, diversity and economic environment of the grocery retail sector, the cost structure of retail, and the use of tripartite contracts with farmers.).

- Independent Retail Europe is an active participant in the annual meetings of the CAP Network Forum on Best Practices in the Agri-Food Supply Chain: A staff member of Independent Retail Europe was a panellist in the roundtable discussion “Food inflation, challenges for consumers and producers” organised during the 3rd annual meeting of the CAP network on 16 November 2023, and was also rapporteur on one of the roundtable discussions at the 4th annual meeting on 9 October 2024.
- On 11 December 2025, Independent Retail Europe, together with a group of members participated to a stakeholder workshop organised by the European Commission on “Retail alliances and their interaction with farmers and SMEs”, with the view to support the Commission’s update of its previous study on the matter and help stakeholders along the agrifood supply chain better understand retail alliances and their activities.
- On 17 March 2026, Independent Retail Europe, together with a group of member retailers, participated to a stakeholder meeting untitled “Reality check on the Unfair Trading Practices” organised by the European Commission to discuss the implementation of the Unfair Trading Practices Directive and the possible way forward in view of the future revision of the Directive, therefore helping the Commission and stakeholders across the chain to exchange on the matter.